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ABSTRACT

This report is based on research conducted in Wyoming in 1967. In the study, a questionnaire was sent to all the high schools and junior high schools in the state, to determine the need for more comprehensive vocational guidance in secondary schools there. Replies were received from all but one of the schools queried, and a followup study, comprised of visits to six of the schools, was conducted. Both studies indicate there is a need for greater emphasis on vocational guidance in the Wyoming secondary schools. (Author)

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VOCATIONAL CHOICE AND GUIDANCE? WHOSE TASK?

John D. Starkey

This paper reports the results of a survey of vocational guidance in the state of Wyoming and directs the attention of college teachers of secondary education to the need for increased student awareness of the teacher's role in vocational guidance. The survey, compiled from questionnaires returned by 77 of the 78 high schools and junior high schools of the state of Wyoming suggests several pertinent facts that tend to support the need for additional vocational guidance. A follow-up study was done to verify the results of the questionnaire in which six widely separated high schools of varying size were visited. The counselor or persons responsible for vocational guidance were interviewed, and the results are reported in the latter part of this study.

The trait measurement model has not been able to provide the answers to our vocational problems, according to Borow (1961). Ego psychology is being used by many counselors, and a study needs to be done to see how this is affecting the advising of the future teachers in our departments, schools, and colleges of education. Borow (1961) states that this should lead to the use of interviews, self-inventories, and selected types of autobiographical records by the counselors. He has used the term "career patterns", but no evidence was found in the Wyoming study to support the use of these ideas, (Starkey, 1967), even where counselors were not following the trait measurement model.

The teacher educators are involved in the task of advising their students. These students, in turn become teachers who are involved in helping the high school students make vocational choices. Although

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it is true that the primary task of vocational counselors is to help students make vocational choices, occupational choices are made in the schoolroom, according to Caplow (1954), under the impersonal pressure of the curriculum, under the influence of the teachers, and remote from many of the realities of the working situation.

This report suggests cooperation from teachers and teacher educators will supplement vocational guidance. The vocational guidance dilemma is clearly shown in the results of the study that indicate such a large number of students taking college preparatory curriculum and then going straight from high school into the world of work. It is not possible to send them to the counselor and give them a test to settle the vocational choice once and for all.

The National Defense Education Act enacted by Congress in 1958 has clearly stated the need for vocational guidance. Teacher educators should be aware of its implications for counselors and teachers, according to this passage from the beginning of the NDEA document:

> The Congress hereby finds and declares that the security of the nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and the technical skills of its young men and women. The present emergency demands that additional and more adequate education opportunities be made available. The defense of this nation depends upon the mastery of modern techniques developed from complex scientific principles. It depends as well upon the discovery and development of new principles, new techniques, and new knowledge.

This act has indeed changed aspects of American life. Knowledge has doubled in each decade of this century, but even so, this National Defense Education Act has not furnished us the means to keep abreast with the rapid progress in industry. If it is possible for the teacher

educator and the teacher to assist in this vocational guidance problem, he should be aware of the information gleaned from the Wyoming study.

The position of the counselor in vocational guidance is becoming increasingly more difficult, and he needs assistance from teachers and teacher educators. There are many theories of vocational choice, according to Hoppock (1963), but none will help if they are not put to use. Vocational choice is difficult for the student. Hutson's study (1962) clearly points out that only a fraction of pupils choosing professions actually achieve that occupational affiliation. If the teacher educator and the teacher are to aid in the area of vocational guidance, they must help the student to know himself better if they are following this guidance position. If not, then, they must be suggesting choices or attempting to make the choice for the student. In either case, many of our students are taking a college preparatory curriculum but in fact are going straight into the world of work in Wyoming. The follow-up study showed noncollege curricula were generally offered for those who wanted vocational subjects but these were not courses that were desired by the students.

The Job Corps is taking in thousands of young men and women who have been to public school but have not been able to make a place for themselves in the world of work. The student becomes disinterested and drops out of school because he cannot meet the standards of the academic curriculum. The student does not have time to take skill subjects that will fit him for work and still meet the requirements of the college preparatory curriculum. The termination of schooling may be

in the 9th grade or even in the middle of college; whenever it occurs, the student usually begins work if he has any salable skill.

The guidance counselor, teacher, and teacher educator should share in the process of guiding students into the right subjects and later occupational goals. Many students are never going to enroll in, much less complete, college. The indications to the teacher educator and teacher are to take a searching look at the vocational curriculum and vocational guidance procedures to determine the real issues facing the student on the very day he terminates his formal schooling. A serious and realistic look at the products of the schools has shown most students proclaiming intentions of going to college. Although about 65 percent of the high school students in Wyoming who are graduated from high school intend to go to college, in reality, less than 50 percent actually start, and more than 30 percent drop out of college (Starkey, 1967).

Although it is inevitably true that our vocational programs will expand, either at the local level or at the federal level, in order to educate the students who have terminated their schooling, the real solution lies elsewhere. The true solution is the pride of work, the fundamental belief in the value of honorable occupations, and the insight leading to satisfaction in gainful employment. The teacher educators and the teachers should assist counselors, parents, superintendents, and school boards to help young men and women realize the desirability of achievement and recognition in the world of work. Instead of searching for security without work, pay without accomplishments, prestige without position, vacation without vocation, and retirement without occupation,

the students in the high schools should propel themselves unerringly toward adequate and sufficient vocations. The student needs help in searching for a job in which he will be happy, an occupation that will meet his needs, and one that is appropriate to his ability. He needs to take pride in his ambition and in his chosen field.

If the curriculum overly emphasizes college preparation, the average student cannot explore the vocations and avocations; he will probably terminate his schooling without being able to enter satisfactorily into the world of work. A criticism of the colleges, educating teachers, will help little, as this hierarchy has been created by the citizens in the world of work and has made some occupations seem much less honorable than others, leaving the average student with no choice but the academic curriculum. When 80 percent of the students in a high school make the statement that they are going to college and do not need vocational training, this is an indication of the great need for some vocational guidance (Starkey, 1967).

Ginzberg (1951), stated that students pass through three stages in vocational choice--fantasy, tentative, and reality. The Hutson,(1962) study tends to show that many of our high school pupils are remaining too long in the fantasy stage of vocational selections. There is almost no direction being given in the schools researched in this study. This tends to leave our schools with a great many students professing to be interested in impossibly mismatched aspirations and abilities. It is necessary to help the individual understand himself and develop plans that will lead to a satisfying career. Dole (1963), made the assumption

that educational choice is not vocational choice even though they are often considered identical by the teachers, teacher educators, counselors, and even the pupils themselves.

In the questionnaire submitted to the 78 high schools and junior high schools in Wyoming, several pertinent facts were learned. The following is a generalized summary extracted from this questionnaire. The high school student who is not going to college needs job information. Ninety percent of the counselors interviewed by questionnaire answered that job information was inadequate, out of date, and unavailable. An overwhelming majority (84 percent) indicated their need for more information about Wyoming. For example, in vocational guidance, the counselor needs to know about the population of Wyoming, and this information is not available according to the counselors. The counselors do not have up to date information about career opportunities in Wyoming to help them guide the students. Salary levels at the various places of employment are not available to the counselors, who are, therefore, not able to advise the students. The counselors, according to the survey, need more training material that in turn would give the student more of a chance to study the companies and the conomy.

Only 52 percent of the counselors interviewed by questionnaires felt their dropouts and non-college-bound students were able to obtain jobs suitable to their education and ability.

Sixty percent of the counselors are unable to devote ample time to giving the non-college-bound student adequate vocational information, and this must indicate a need for more help from other sources such as the teacher and the teacher educator.

Although psychologists have long recognized the relationship between the possession of certain aptitudes and success in specific occupations as shown by Crawford and Burnham (1946), Stalnaker (1963), and Thorndike (1963), 53 percent of the Wyoming high schools and junior high schools do not have a school-wide aptitude testing program.

The information libraries of the high school guidance departments do not contain sufficient occupational information to meet the needs of the students. Most counselors answered the questionnaire by making this statement

Exactly 50 percent of the counselors queried stated they do not have an adequate listing of private and vocational schools for those who are not college bound. This indicates that guidance to this type of education may be inadequate.

Each of the counselors interviewed mentioned the private schools being considered by the high school students when interviewed for the purpose of this study. There should be a systematic approach to the dissemination of information about private schools. The private schools in Wyoming have no published standards according to the Wyoming Technical Institute (1967). The difficulty in advising students is multiplied by the fact that only information furnished by the sales representative is available.

The counselors of Wyoming were asked, "Do you have available a Career Index, Career Guidance Index, or Occupational Index?" it was found that two-thirds of the counselors have no aids of this kind available. The above guides certainly are not the answer to vocational guidance, but they are helpful to most counselors, teachers, and students.

One-third of the schools have an Occupational Outlook Handbook, but these are mostly out of date and are of little actual value.

One-third have a Dictionary of Occupational Titles, but only one of the latest 1965 editions was found in the schools visited.

Two-thirds of the counselors stated that they did not have access to the General Aptitude Test Battery. The General Aptitude Test Battery is available to all, according to the Wyoming State Employment Service.

Twenty-two percent of the counselors answered "No" to the following question: "Are the students who drop out of school, or are non-college bound prepared to go into a vocation?" The majority, in interpreting this question in the affirmative indicated the students were ready to go into a vocation, but not one fitting their abilities.

The follow-up study was made of vocational guidance in Wyoming by selecting six widely separated high schools of varying size. Each of these schools was visited, and the counselor or persons responsible for vocational guidance were interviewed. These high schools range in size from 157 students to 1,223 students with the other high schools having 353, 450, 300, and 700 students. The number of full-time or part-time counselors varied. The smallest school had no counselor at all, but the principal was doing an excellent job of vocational counseling. He knew the students, the employers, and how to get jobs for the students. He had some contact with the employment service and was willing to call for help in vocational choice and selection. One counselor had two high schools and spent one day per month with the smaller of the two. Two of the high schools had one full-time counselor for both boys and girls,

while the two largest high schools had both boy's and girls' counselors. The largest school of those studied by interview had a program of Distributive Education, but it did not succeed because they could not find a trained teacher. The Distributive Education program, which is a good source of vocational guidance, is almost completely absent in the curriculums in the Wyoming high schools. The curriculums in the high schools of Wyoming are based on money available, personnel, and the likes and dislikes of the principal and/or school boards, rather than the needs of the students. The largest school had a curriculum offering 27 classes, but the smallest school had the best vocational guidance program and the largest vocational program based on per-pupil ratio.

The complaint heard from each vocational teacher was the low quality of the vocational student and the low prestige of the vocational program. The quality of the student in the vocational programs is far below what would be indicated in the world of work according to the vocations. When 80 percent of the jobs in a state are filled by noncollege people and the schools of Wyoming are offering vocational subjects to less than 20 percent (Starkey, 1967), then the quality of students pursuing the college preparatory curriculum as opposed to the quality of student-aged employees who have pursued a terminal curriculum. The schools in Wyoming are actually teaching all the required vocational subjects (Starkey, 1967), but the discrepancy lies in the vocational guidance; perhaps the students in Wyoming are remaining in the fantasy stage too long, as suggested by Hutson (1962).

Literature that urged the child to go to college was available. Posters urged the student into the right occupation. The urging of a person or student "not" to do something is a negative panacea that does nothing. A positive approach to "do" is a much sounder psychological approach. The job prestige paradox is based on some false assumptions. One false assumption is that anyone could be an engineer if he were willing to work hard enough. The middle class values of the counselor may be prolonging the stay in the fantasy of being an engineer, when the student should be striving to become an excellent machinist.

The six schools in the follow-up study conducted no vocational guidance interviews as such. One school was considering a career booklet to help each student. One school gave more than one type of diploma, which was considered by the counselor as an aid because he felt it prevented dropouts. A study of the dropout situation was not made except for its implications for vocational guidance. Over 50 percent of the counselors answering the questionnaire thought that dropouts did not receive jobs suitable to their abilities. Vocational guidance for these students was found to be almost entirely lacking.

A further study needs to be made in many states to determine the present vocational guidance relationship among counselor educators, teacher educators, counselors, teachers, parents, and students.

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